

# **SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION**

## **HEARING ON CLIMATE SCIENCE AND THE USGCRP NATIONAL ASSESSMENT**

**TUESDAY, JULY 18, 2000**

### **TESTIMONY OF SENATOR LARRY E. CRAIG**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me to testify at this very important hearing. On June 16, 2000, I spoke on the Senate Floor about the Administration's recently released draft National Assessment Synthesis Report. I ask that a copy of that Statement be included in the record of this hearing.

Mr. Chairman, the potential of global climate change is one of the most important environmental issues of this new century. The stakes are high. Worst-case scenarios involving rising temperatures and sea levels scare many people. On the other hand, premature government action to cut back energy use to levels lower than those in the growth-oriented nineties could cool the economy faster than it cools the climate.

What is required at this time, Mr. Chairman, is steady and thoughtful leadership. Responsible government includes environmental stewardship. However, the ultimate obligation of government is to protect freedom. By freedom I mean the opportunity to achieve one's true potential as an individual, a community, or a nation: the freedom to grow!

Freedom spawns discovery and innovation. Discovery and innovation solve problems and create opportunities. This is the true spirit of America.

Mr. Chairman, today you will have the co-chairs of the National Assessment before you. These are accomplished men with impressive scientific backgrounds. The Committee will have the

opportunity to question them on a document that I believe is long on fear and short on conclusive science.

Let me lay-out some of the reasons why I am so concerned about this document.

The National Assessment process was authorized under the Global Change Research Act of 1990 but did not officially begin until January, 1998 – one month after the Kyoto Protocol. The final report was expected in January, 2000, but was delayed.

Last year, in the Fiscal Year 2000 appropriations, Congress directed that all research used in the National Assessment must be subjected to peer review and made available to the public prior to use in the Assessment, and the Assessment must be made available to the public through the Federal Register for a 60 day public comment period. This was not challenged by the Administration.

The Administration released a “draft” summary report on June 12<sup>th</sup> of this year by posting it on a website and publishing a notice in the Federal Register that it was available for comment until August 11<sup>th</sup>. This action is clearly at odds with Congressional intent. The underlying regional (geographic) and sector (health, agriculture, forests, water, coastal) work that was to have served as the basis for the summary report has not been completed or made available for review.

In a June 30<sup>th</sup> letter to Congressman James Sensenbrenner, Chairman of the House Committee on Science, Neal Lane, who testified before this Committee on May 17<sup>th</sup> Mr. Chairman, stretched credibility in defending this action. Although taxpayer funds were provided to support the work, he claimed the underlying reports were not “federal” reports and therefore not covered by the earlier Congressional guidance. The underlying reports are to be completed over the next year or so and published by the respective teams working on them.

Mr. Chairman, a question that begs an answer is: **Why the rush to release the National Assessment?** The premature release of this document allows for more polarizing advocacy. Although supposedly a “draft” report published for technical review and comment, it was trumpeted by President Clinton on the day of its release and served as a basis for repeating tired claims:

*“It suggests that changes in climate could mean more extreme weather, more floods, more droughts, disrupted water supplies, loss of species, dangerously rising sea levels.”*

It’s easy to miss (or ignore) the qualifications to these predictions and simply report that the Assessment forecasts dire changes in climate in the future. For example, a page one story in *The New York Times* on June 12<sup>th</sup> carried the headline: *“Report Forecasts Warming’s Effects - Significant Climate Changes Predicted for the Country.”*

In Texas, a July 4<sup>th</sup> story by the environmental reporter at the *Dallas Morning News* reported on action by five environmental groups asking Governor Bush – *“to launch a Texas assault on global warming, which scientists say could heat up North Texas in the next century.”* The story went on to discuss the draft National Assessment including the comment – *“Two computer simulations of the future of Texas climate show sharp rises in the July heat index, with the worst impact in North Texas.”*

Not everyone has been misled. *The Wall Street Journal* published an article entitled: *“U.S. Study on Global Warming May Overplay Dire Side”* on May 26<sup>th</sup>, in anticipation of the impending release. A similar story ran in *The Detroit News* on May 28<sup>th</sup>. Numerous Op-eds and Letters to the Editor have also run.

However, Mr. Chairman, the early release of this document raises more intriguing political questions than helpful probative scientific ones. For example, it puts the Assessment on a timetable for inclusion in the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s “Third Assessment Report” on climate change which is due to be finalized next year. In fact, Mr. Chairman, I have been informed by

staff that drafts are already circulating for comment and these drafts include references to the U.S. National Assessment.

It is becoming clear that the June 12<sup>th</sup> release of the Assessment is serving as support for campaign claims by Al Gore to support his views on climate and energy use. Indeed, his release on environment and energy policy occurred just two weeks later on June 26<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Chairman, the Administration could have avoided seeding these concerns if it had followed the common sense approach requested by Congress and taken the time to get it right:

First, complete the underlying regional and sector work, peer review the science used as its basis, and make the results available for public comment;

Second, write the synthesis overview report based on this work, not independently, peer review the results and make a complete draft easily available for all interested citizens to review with enough time to gather complete comments and expose them to the public.

In addition, Mr. Chairman, the independent National Research Council should have a strong role in the drafting process, not just White House allies as implied in some critiques.

Lastly, but importantly, one must question the use of foreign computer models in this study. Was this in our best interest? The National Assessment used a Canadian and a British Large Scale General Circulation Model (GCM's) to make climate change predictions at a regional level. According to a June 23<sup>rd</sup> *Science Magazine* article entitled "*Dueling Models: Future U.S. Climate Uncertain*," there is a clear consensus of opinion in the scientific community that these models are not intended, or capable of, predicting future impacts of climate change on a regional basis. Even the EPA web site makes this point.

The mere use of the foreign computer models in the National Assessment once again, begs an answer to an obvious question: **What needs to be done to improve U.S. modeling capability?**

Other questions that need answers are: How well has the current Administration been spending our money in the climate arena? Do we have our scientific priorities in order?

These, along with many other questions, I hope will be asked of those testifying before you and the Committee this morning. We must pursue a more consensus building approach to the climate change issue. Senator Frank Murkowski and I have introduced legislation that we believe provides a framework for national consensus – making continued stalemate on this issue unnecessary and intolerable. We have the vehicle to move forward. We should do so expeditiously, and with the constructive support of the Administration.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.